

**Testimony provided by Diana Gonzalez**  
**March 13, 2006**  
**In support of H.B. 5782**

Good afternoon. My name is Diana Gonzalez. I am here to support H.B. 5782, calling for 16- and 17-year-olds to be tried in the juvenile justice system instead of the adult justice system. I know first hand the consequences of treating children like adults. My son was David Burgos. David committed suicide last July 24 while he was incarcerated at Manson Youth Institution. He was 17-years-old.

We are never going to get a good outcome when teenagers are put together with adults. Teenagers and adults are different from each other. It's like mixing goats and sheep in the same pasture. You can't do it. It doesn't work. What's frustrating for me is that we know it doesn't work. We've known it doesn't work for a long time.

So here is my question. What's it going to take for us to make the change? This issue has already been in front of the legislature for several years. Why do we have to wait until there is a crisis? Why do we wait for a tragedy? Why does someone like my son have to die before we make a change we know is right? It's time for us to stop talking about making this change and do it. I'm tired of hearing that this is a problem and not seeing any changes being made. I'm tired of reading the articles in the paper and realizing that this is all about money – that people think a change is too expensive.

I'm here today to tell you that it isn't about the money. It's about doing the right thing. Do we have the money to do the right thing? We do. We spend the money now, we are just spending the money that we have in the wrong way. The way the system operates now doesn't work. My son is an example of that. Really, it's common sense. When you want something you have to invest in it, and do the work before you see the rewards. Business people do it all the time. You don't see the rewards right away, but over time you see all the rewards and you save money in the long run by spending it correctly in the beginning. It's about setting priorities and about spending your money in line with those priorities.

There's talk about making changes in the adult system to make cells or programs better for youth. That would be spending money foolishly. You can't make an adult cell appropriate for a youth. It also shows a mix up in priorities – that it's more important to save money than to save children. What I'm hearing now is that our youth aren't worth tackling a problem that might be hard and cost some money. What I'm hearing is that my son wasn't worth it.

Here's the real question I want to ask you – the real reason I'm here today. Whose child is next? It could be my neighbor's child, it could be your neighbor's child, it could be your child. Put yourselves in these shoes. What decision would you make for your child? How would you want your child treated? Make this change. Keep 16- and 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system. Thank you.